

Wildlife Habitat Management

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry



Forest management can be tailored to benefit any species or groups of species. Timber harvest can serve as a valuable wildlife management tool, especially when the following principles and techniques are taken into account.

In general, maintaining a **diverse habitat** with a mix of forest, small openings and “edges” between them will benefit deer, rabbit, turkey, raccoon, quail, grouse and many non-game animals.

Create openings in the forest to provide more sunlight, which in turn produces accessible foods. Openings can include **timber harvests**, seeded **log landings and roads**, long, narrow **game strips** in unbroken forest, and permanent wildlife **food plots** (at least ¼ acre in size).

“Feather” forest edges (thin the forest near openings to encourage a brushy edge).

Leave buffers along streams: minimum 50’ uncut buffers along each side of perennial streams, and twice that distance along trout streams and in areas managed for songbirds. **Swamps, bogs and other wetlands** demand special consideration.

Leave 1 to 3 den trees per acre and as many large **dead trees (snags)** as possible to benefit squirrels, raccoons and birds. Leave a few other trees in a clump around each den tree. **Snags** should be at least 12” diameter and 10’ tall. Create snags where few are present by girdling commercially undesirable trees.

Build nest boxes for squirrel, bats, and certain birds if den trees are lacking. Patterns for constructing nest boxes are available from Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, 1-800-624-7406.

Thin crowded stands to increase tree growth, health and mast (food) production.

Establish stands of **native warm season grasses** for big game and game birds.

Use prescribed fire to maintain food plots and native warm season grass plantings, and to improve habitat in pine stands (older than 10-15 years).

Exclude livestock from the woods. They compete with wildlife for browse, compact the soil, and damage young trees.

Make piles of brush and limbs after timber cutting to provide cover for rabbit, quail and songbirds.

Plant evergreens to provide hiding cover and winter shelter for many wildlife species.

Allow **brush and trees** to grow along fences, and provide **“headquarters areas”** - dense brush thickets - to provide cover for rabbit, quail, etc.

Manage for oak and other hard-mast-producers by cutting other competing species around them. Conduct periodic timber harvests to regenerate oaks that are past their mast-producing prime in order to assure a future acorn supply. Sawtooth (Chinese) oak, available from the State Seedling Nursery, and blight-resistant chestnut, which can be ordered from several commercial nurseries in Tennessee, are heavy and consistent mast producers.

Plan ahead for the gypsy moth, an invasive pest that can devastate oak forests on dry sites. Strive for a diverse, healthy forest. Yellow poplar and sugar maple are avoided by the gypsy moth.

Protect endangered species on your land. These usually occur in small, unusual habitats near water and on rock outcrops. Information can be obtained from handbooks available through the Forestry Division.

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